

Meditation in your mind like:

Boring Interesting
Esoteric Familiar
Ascetic Sensual
Unproductive Extremely productive
Difficult Natural
Wimpy Powerful

Meditation is the practice and process of paying attention and focusing your awareness. When you meditate, a number of desirable things begin to happen — slowly, at first, and deepening over time.

As I described in *Love & Survival*:

First, *when you can focus your awareness, you gain more power.* When you concentrate any form of energy, including mental energy, you gain power. When you focus your mind, you concentrate better. When you concentrate better, you perform better. You can accomplish more, whether in the classroom, in the board room, or in the athletic arena.

Whatever you do, you can do it more effectively when you meditate.

It is for this reason that spiritual teachers and texts often caution that one should begin the practice of meditation only in the context of other spiritual practices and disciplines that help develop compassion and wisdom to use properly this increased power.

Second, *you enjoy your senses more fully.* Although people sometimes view or use meditation as an ascetic experience to *control* their senses, meditation also can *enhance* your senses in ways that are profoundly sensual. Anything that you enjoy — food, sex, music, art, massage, and so on — is greatly enhanced by meditation.

When you pay attention to something, it's a lot more enjoyable.

Also, you don't need as much of it to get the same degree of pleasure, so you are more likely to enjoy without excess.

When you keep a wall around your heart to armor and protect it from pain, you also diminish your capacity to feel pleasure.

When your life is in a continual rush, you may miss exquisite pleasures that exist from moment to moment.

Attention spans get shorter. The need for stimulation continually increases just to feel *anything*. Meditation increases awareness and sensitivity; as such, it can be an antidote to numbness and distraction.

Third, *your mind quiets down and you experience an inner sense of peace, joy, and well-being.* When I first learned to meditate and began getting glimpses of inner peace, this experience changed my life.

It redefined and reframed my experience. Before, I thought piece of mind came from getting and doing; now, I understand that it comes from *being*.

It is our true nature to be peaceful until we disturb it.

This is a radically different concept of where our happiness and our wellbeing come from. In one of life's great paradoxes, not being aware of this truth, we often end up disturbing our inner peace while striving to get or to do what we think will bring that same peace to us.

Fourth, *you may directly experience and become more aware of the transcendent interconnectedness that already exists.* You may have a direct experience of God or the universal Self, whatever name you give to this experience. Meditation is simple in concept but difficult to master. Fortunately, you don't have to master meditation to benefit from it. You just have to practice. No one ever really masters it completely, but even a few steps down that road can make a meaningful difference. It is the *process* of meditation that makes it so beneficial, not how well you perform.

Well, the truth is, you're going to follow the same path no matter how high up the mountain you want to go. The basic instructions remain the same — but you get to choose your destination.

Among the most popular stopping places and promontories en route to the summit are the following:

- _ Stronger focus and concentration
- _ Reduced tension, anxiety, and stress
- _ Clearer thinking and less emotional turmoil
- _ Lower blood pressure and cholesterol
- _ Support in kicking addictions and other self-defeating behaviors
- _ Greater creativity and enhanced performance in work and play
- _ Increased self-understanding and self-acceptance
- _ More joy, love, and spontaneity
- _ Greater intimacy with friends and family members
- _ Deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- _ Glimpses of a spiritual dimension of being

As you can see, these way stations are actually major destinations in their own right, and all of them are well worth reaching.

The following are a few of the stages you may pass through on the path to just being:

- _ Getting used to sitting still
- _ Developing the ability to turn your attention inward
- _ Struggling to focus your attention
- _ Being distracted again and again
- _ Becoming more focused
- _ Feeling more relaxed as you meditate
- _ Noticing fleeting moments when your mind settles down
- _ Experiencing brief glimpses of stillness and peace